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TAGS: PREL ECON KWBG MARR TU IS
SUBJECT: TURKEY: Abbas to tell GOT "STOP EMPOWERING HAMAS"

REF: A. ANKARA 1011
1B. 07 ANKARA 2760
1C. 07 ANKARA 2751
1D. 07 ANKARA 2736

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11. (S) Summary: Despite multiple embassies' expressions of concern regarding the growing number of NGO-sponsored Muslim-based conferences in Turkey attended by radical regional participants, the Islamist-rooted Justice and Development Party-led (AKP) GOT has chosen to turn a blind eye. PLO Ambassador Maarouf has repeatedly explained to Turkish officials that such events, compounded by GOT meetings with "Gaza Government" leaders, are empowering Hamas and undermining the Palestinian Authority (PA)'s ability to reach an internal Palestinian compromise. For this reason, PA President Abbas will visit Ankara, July 16-18, to discuss the issue with President Gul and PM Erdogan under the guise of opening the new PLO Embassy, according to Maarouf. We have also officially and unofficially raised the NGO conferences with the GOT to be told that such gatherings are part of a civil society. More potentially troublesome, we have heard unconfirmed reports that GOT officials have encouraged NGOs to hold the events to provide cover for meetings with controversial attendees on the margins. End Summary.

12. (S) PLO Ambassador Nabil Maarouf expressed to us growing concern regarding GOT policy toward Palestine. The GOT's tacit support for Hamas is "very dangerous" and undermines the ongoing efforts to reach an intra-Palestinian solution, he argued. Hamas is misusing Turkey's attempts to end its isolation to gain more independence for Gaza to the PA's detriment. Maarouf commented that the senior AKP leadership seems to have a romantic attachment to Hamas, viewing them almost as standard-bearers for Muslim struggle in the region. This is naive and improperly colors their policy. The administration must learn to temper its emotions over the Palestinian issue and eliminate "its religious bias," said Maarouf.

13. (S) Maarouf highlighted two issues that he found particularly alarming: the growing number of questionable NGO conferences in support of Palestine held in Istanbul and Hamas officials' visits to Ankara. Over the past years, numerous Muslim NGOs have held meetings in Turkey, mostly associated with Palestine. (For example, controversial Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood member Yousef al Qaradawi reportedly attended a July 8 Muslim environment conference in

Istanbul.) This increased significantly during the Gaza crisis. A lot of money is spent on these gatherings and they attract a lot of people, noted Maarouf. In May and June alone, NGOs held seven conferences regarding Palestine in Istanbul. He underscored that the conference participants included well-known radicals from the Arab world, most notably from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, and Morocco. While the events themselves appear reputable and are held on the pretext of discussing humanitarian issues, they provide a venue for such individuals to meet on the margins.

¶ 14. (S) GOT officials received two Hamas delegations in June, reported Maarouf. As carried in some Turkish media outlets, Gaza Health Minister Ismail Haniye met with Health Minister Akdag during a June 24 visit to Ankara to discuss humanitarian assistance with NGOs. (NOTE: When asked about the press claims, the Israel/Palestine desk officer told us the MFA did not have any information about the visit. END NOTE) The Gaza Government Secretary General's meeting with one of PM Erdogan's top advisors here, however, went completely unreported. The GOT is able to keep the visits and the NGO meetings under wraps unless Hamas makes it public or the web-based information is translated from Arabic, claimed Maarouf.

¶ 15. (S) The PLO Ambassador noted that he has raised his concerns with the MFA and Prime Ministry on multiple occasions. The MFA, he claimed, understands the situation, but is unable to exert any influence on the problem. Nevertheless, GOT officials within the MFA and Prime Ministry have officially told him that as the Istanbul conferences are

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sponsored by private organizations and held on the outskirts of Istanbul, the government cannot intervene without proof of malevolence. When asked about the Hamas visits, Maarouf said GOT officials underscored that the meetings were part of a larger non-governmental agenda and that it is Turkey's policy to engage all sides.

¶ 16. (S) Unable to convince the GOT otherwise, Maarouf told us he encouraged Abbas to come to Turkey for the first time since the Gaza crisis to deliver the same message -- stop empowering Hamas -- under the guise of opening the new PLO Embassy. He noted that Abbas will raise the NGO and visit issues in a "modest manner" with President Gul and PM Erdogan. The leaders will also discuss the Middle East peace process (MEPP), President Obama's regional initiatives, and bilateral relations.

¶ 17. (S//NF) COMMENT: We have officially and unofficially raised concerns with the GOT that the NGO conferences are being used for Hamas fundraising and have received the same responses as those given to Ambassador Maarouf (REFS B,C, and D). The Egyptian and Israeli Embassies have also expressed similar frustration over GOT indifference to the issue. While the Turkish Government maintains that such gatherings are a function of a democratic society, it chose to put off a similar meeting of violent anti-Iraq Sunni groups in 2006. In the case of Palestine, however, PM Erdogan and FM Davutoglu share a sense of solidarity with Hamas based on a belief that the group would reject violence if afforded the same opportunities as the AKP to participate in a democratic process. Al Jazeera Ankara bureau chief Yucef al-Sahrif (PLEASE PROTECT) told us that he met with a Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH) leader, a top NGO fundraiser during the Gaza Crisis and co-host of several conferences, to discuss the reason for the increase in NGO meetings. Al-Sahrif reported that the IHH leader proudly claimed that then-Senior Foreign Policy Advisor Davutoglu had asked the organization to host a series of conferences in Istanbul that would allow him to meet with controversial figures in attendance off the radar screen. We have not been able to confirm al-Sharif's claims.

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